

SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATION COMMITTEE

16th November 2011

Scrutiny Co-ordination

Committee Members Present: Councillor Blundell
Councillor Foster
Councillor Lakha
Councillor Lancaster
Councillor Mrs Lucas (Chair)
Councillor M. Mutton
Councillor Ruane
Councillor Sawdon
Councillor Taylor
Councillor Walsh (Substitute for Councillor Welsh)

Other Members Present: Councillor Duggins

Employees Present: L. Commane (Finance and Legal Services Directorate)
J. Parry (Assistant Chief Executive)
M. Salmon (Customer and Workforce Services Directorate)
A. West (Chief Executive's Directorate)
J. Venn (Chief Executive's Directorate)

Apologies: Councillor McNicholas (Deputy Chair)
Councillor Welsh

Public Business

66. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Lancaster declared a personal interest in the matter the subject of minute 68/11 below headed "Welfare Reform Bill" in so far as it related to her employment at a Community Care Association. In accordance with Paragraph 5.1.9 of the City Council's Constitution, she disclosed the interest and remained in the meeting for consideration of the matter.

67. Minutes

- (a) The minutes of the meeting held on 5th October 2011 were signed as a true record.
- (b) There were no matters arising.

68. Welfare Reform Bill

The Committee received a presentation from the Assistant Director (Policy, Partnership and Performance), the Assistant Director (Special Projects Finance) and the City Council's Housing Benefits Manager, on the proposals in the Welfare Reform Bill to introduce changes to the welfare system. The potential implications for the Local Authority and the City were

significant and covered the remit of a number of Scrutiny Boards. The presentation and discussion assisted Members in understanding key issues and identified the impacts that Scrutiny needed to address in its Work Programme.

The Welfare Reform Bill aimed to “Create the right incentives to get more people into work by ensuring work always pays; Protect the most vulnerable in society; and Deliver fairness to those claiming benefits and the tax-payer”. The presentation provided details of:

- The context and background of Welfare Reform
- The main elements of the Bill
- Key changes already agreed and/or happening
- Local Housing Allowance cuts – starting in January 2012
- Examples of real impact on individuals
- The key changes to come
- Universal Credit – Implementation, Conditionality and timetable
- The Implications of the Reform for the City Council
- The Localisation of Council Tax
- Some operational/policy implications
- The wider implications for the City and Local Authority partners
- The likely implications for the people of Coventry who need to claim benefits
- How the City Council is responding
- The involvement of Elected Members
- Key messages

The Committee discussed the proposals and questions officers on aspects of the proposals, acknowledging that the Bill was still a work in progress and that many details were unknown at this stage. They outlined their concerns and identified issues that would require further information/investigation. Officers would respond to the specific questions that it was possible to answer at this stage, in a briefing note to Members, together with copies of examples of information sent out to landlords and those affected by the proposals.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) The presentation be noted.**
- (2) The specific questions that it was possible to answer at this stage be responded to in a Briefing Note to all Members, together with a copy of the presentation slides and examples of the information sent out to landlords and those affected by the proposals.**

69. Cabinet/Cabinet Member Items of Urgent Public Business – Education Capital: Priority Schools Building Programme

The Committee noted that at their meeting on 4th October 2011 Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Children, Learning and Young People headed 'Education Capital: Priority Schools Building Programme', a copy of which had been circulated to Members and the Chair of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee had attended the Cabinet meeting and agreed that the decision was urgent and that Call-in should not apply. In accordance with paragraph 4.5.27.4 of the City Council Constitution, the report was presented to the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee in order for them to understand the reasons for urgency which was to enable the submission of bids for funding from the Priority Schools Building Programme on behalf of seven City schools by the required date.

70. Report Back on Conference/Seminar – Adult and Children’s Services (ADCS/ADASS/LGA) Annual Conference

The Committee noted a report of the Director of Children, Learning and Young People that that provided details of the Adult and Children’s Services (ADCS/ADASS/LGA) Annual Conference held in Harrogate on 21st – 23rd October 2009, that he had attended with Councillors Blundell and Kelly.

The event was the major conference for Elected Members, Seniors Officers and a wide range of third sector and for profit organisations that provide services to children and adults. The programme was a combination of major set piece events, such as addresses from the Secretaries of State for Health and Children, Schools and Families, their shadows from the opposition parties and the Presidents of the ADCS and ADASS and workshops on a wide range of topics and an exhibition.

The benefits of attendance at the Conference were that the major conference speeches gave insight into the latest thinking of key Government and opposition figures on children's and adults services. The workshops provided the opportunity for some in depth discussion on topics such as the Common Assessment Framework, the 21st Century Schools White Paper and the Costs of Implementing Lord Laming's recommendations. The Conference also provided excellent opportunities to network with colleagues from across the country.

The major deficiency of the Conference from the perspective of a Director of Children's Services was the lack of content of any weight on schools issues. This would need to be addressed to ensure that the Conference had sustained attendance from Directors of Children’s Services and lead Elected Members for Children's Services.

71. Report Back on Conference/Seminar – Centre for Public Scrutiny 7th Annual Conference

The Committee noted a report of Councillor Lakha that provided details of the Centre for Public Scrutiny 7th Annual Conference that he had attended, with the Assistant Director (Performance and Scrutiny) in Nottingham on 9th June 2009.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny was a national body that promoted and supported the development of effective scrutiny in government. Its annual conference provided an opportunity for people involved in scrutiny across local government to learn from best practice and hear about future developments.

The benefits of attending the Conference were that the Conference, titled "A Critical Friend for Critical Times" and speakers from local and national government shared their experience of scrutiny and potential developments in the context of the government agenda for strengthening community empowerment and democracy. Workshops included how scrutiny could move from scrutiny of services to scrutiny of place, reflecting the increased role for scrutiny in partnerships, developing health scrutiny to address health inequalities not just health services, and engaging the public in scrutiny. The conference provided the opportunity for Councillors and Officers to highlight good practice and discuss areas of concern which would help scrutiny develop in the future.

Future attendance at the conference was recommended as this was a useful annual opportunity to take stock of developments in the scrutiny agenda.

72. Report Back on Conference/Seminar – Environmental Health – Year Ahead Leadership Conference

The Committee noted a report of the Director of Community Services that provided details of the Environmental Health – Year Ahead Leadership Conference that had been attended by the Environmental Health Manager and Councillor Noonan in Stratford Upon Avon on 2nd – 3rd April 2009.

The Local Authority Coordinating body for Regulatory Services and the Chartered Institute for Environmental Health organised this third Annual Conference for Local Authority leadership to explore the current regulatory landscape and look ahead to future changes and challenges.

The benefits of attendance at the Conference were the opportunity for councillors from England, Wales, Scotland & Northern Ireland to share thoughts on the political landscape that environmental health officers would face in the devolved countries over the coming year and to hear the views of key speakers on the challenges ahead. Delegates heard more about the Local Better Regulation Office Primary Authority Scheme which went live on the 6th April 2009 and what primary authority relationships meant for businesses and councils working together. Discussion on tobacco and smokefree issues from the national, regional and local perspective, provided an update on the key national priorities ahead for the Food Standards Agency; the Health and Safety Executive; the Environment Agency and DEFRA. The conference gives Environmental Health leadership an overview of the future regulatory landscape and allowed service planning to be well informed. Additionally it gave Elected Members insight into the broader political issues confronted by the service and its customers, allowing corporate strategy to be better informed.

73. Report Back on Conference/Seminar – Local Government Improvement and Development (I&DeA) Beacon Conference – Night Time Economy

The Committee noted a report of Councillor Andrews that provided details of the Local Government Improvement and Development (I&DeA) Beacon Conference – Night Time Economy that he had attended, with the Environmental Health Manager in York on 22nd – 23rd June 2009.

In 2009, a number of Local Authorities, Westminster, Brighton and Hove, Hinckley and Bosworth, Nottingham, London Borough of Havering, received Beacon status for their work in improving the night time economy. A part aim of the Beacon Award Scheme and this Conference was to share learning across local authorities/partners.

The benefits of attending the Conference were that it enabled those attending to hear some of the case study material, submitted by the authorities who had received Beacon Status, including the use of Street Pastors, Policing and Community resources to regulate the night time economy, Street Drinking and night time violence, the use of Award Schemes, Involving the whole community in developing the night time economy, Developing strong partnership working, and The effective use of regulation. There were keynote speeches and the opportunity for delegates to share experiences through workshops and a guided tour of York's night time economy by the York Police and Council Licensing Officer, where issues around the control and development of the night time economy were discussed. The Conference allowed Elected Members and Officers to expand their knowledge of good practice and innovation and demonstrate the value of sharing good practice through the Beacon

Scheme. Councillor Andrews role on the Licensing and regulatory Committee would be enhanced by the knowledge gained at the Conference.

74. Report Back on Conference/Seminar – National Children and Adult Services Conference – Brighter Futures for All

The Committee noted a report of the Director of Community Services that provided details of the National Children and Adult Services Conference – Brighter Futures for All that he had attended with Councillor O'Boyle in Harrogate on 21st – 23rd October 2009.

The benefits of attending the Annual Social Services Conference that was attended by Councillors and Directors with responsibilities for Adults or Children's Services and partners from voluntary and private sector providers, were the opportunity to discuss and debate the latest issues affecting children and adult services, for contacts to be made and for participants to be able to learn from each other. The event included keynote speeches, a plenary session on the Social Care Green Paper, a range of plenary, policy and fringe sessions covering transforming adult dementia services, the Social Work Task Force and the impact of the recession on children and adult services. There were a number of key launches and an exhibition of over 100 organisations from the public, private and third sectors showcased new ways of working.

75. Report Back on Conference/Seminar – What Future for Social and Affordable Housing Seminar

The Committee noted a report of Councillor Bigham that provided details of the What Future for Social and Affordable Housing Seminar that she had attended in London on 4th December 2009.

An extremely useful and interesting event, the Seminar enabled engagement, provided presentations from influential and knowledgeable experts in the field and examined how progression in house build could be maintained during a recession, including best methods of delivering targets and standards. Key speakers at the Seminar covered the need for more housing land because of the rise in population and households, the need for 'unlocking' public land so that the supply in each local authority could be increased, what was important for Elected Members and officers to take into account when considering new social/affordable housing: 'Improve standards of service delivery for tenants; support 'decent' homes and neighbourhoods; promote effective tenant involvement and empowerment; ensure providers were well run and delivered value for money; promote and protect public and private investment; and encourage and support a supply of well managed social housing.

76. Report Back on Conference/Seminar – Representation at City Day in Volgograd

The Committee noted a report of Councillor Mutton that provided details of the Representation at City Day in Volgograd that he had attended with the Assistant Director (Streetscene and Green Space) on 8th – 12th September 2011. The visit was aimed at strengthening connections between Volgograd and Coventry that were established during a number of previous visits to Volgograd by Council Members and Officers and return visits to Coventry by Volgograd officials. The itinerary for the visit involved a diverse range of meetings, events and discussions and also involvement in the City Day Procession.

The visit was successful and resulted in the potential for tangible benefits, particularly to children and students in Coventry and Volgograd and also strengthened the twinning links between the two cities. As the delegation was led by the Leader of the Council, Volgograd officials were able to get another perspective on how the City Council operated and prompted

discussions with officials about the difficulties facing local and national government in the UK in these challenging times. Benefits of twinning were best realised through citizens, particularly children. City Officials, school heads and schoolchildren heard about the Olympics and the part Coventry was to play in hosting football. The visit included meeting the family who won a competition in Volgograd to design part of the Godiva Awakes quilt. All officials and residents were keen to continue twinning links and particularly to set up links between children, including arranging exchange visits with schoolchildren in 2012. Councillor Mutton was interviewed and filmed for local and regional television 3 times and also radio during the visit, to discuss the links between the Cities and promote Coventry Council and the wider City as an excellent place to do business, work and spend leisure time. Coventry was also asked to support Volgograd in its attempt to achieve a 'European Diploma', by writing a letter of support to the European Union in Strasbourg. The support of Coventry, its oldest 'twin', was seen as vitally important to Volgograd. Coventry City and the Council was held in extremely high regard by Volgograd officials and residents.

Councillor Mutton, the Chief Executive and the Director of Children, Learning and Young People had since discussed how relationships between Coventry and Volgograd children could be developed. A competition for schoolchildren to exchange gifts and further working together via e-mail, teleconferencing and other social media were being explored. Since the visit, six secondary schools in Coventry had proposed ideas for collaborative projects with schools in Volgograd, which had been sent to International Development, Volgograd. Coventry had been asked to identify 3 schools to whom 3 Volgograd schools could send Christmas toys which had been produced by their pupils. Receiving schools would be expected to exhibit the toys in their school or community and send photographs back to Volgograd, this might develop into an annual Christmas toy exchange. The Director of Children, Learning and Young People would pursue the follow up actions arising from the visit.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) The action taken to avoid the submission of late reports back on attendance at Conferences/Seminars in future, be noted.**
- (2) A letter be sent, on behalf of the Chair of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee, to all Elected Members and to Members of the Corporate Management Board setting out the reporting requirements for the submission of any future late reports back on attendance at Conferences/Seminars.**

76. Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee Work Programme 2011/2012

The Committee noted the Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2011/12 and that:

- The meeting of the Committee on 30th November 2011 had been re-scheduled to 20th December 2011.
- The Transformation Programme – Quarterly Progress Report would be considered at the meeting of the Committee on 4th January 2012.

77. Outstanding Issues

There were no outstanding issues.

78. Meeting Evaluation

The Committee concluded that the presentation on the Welfare Reform Bill had been

extremely informative and was well delivered, it had provided Members with an outline understanding of the significant implications ahead.